

Graduate Institute Oral History Project

Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (IHEID)

Geneva, Switzerland

Juji Faure (they/them)

Interviewed by

Amanda Monroe (she/her)

December 7, 2022

Juji's Apartment, Geneva, Switzerland

Background:

This collection consists of oral histories collected by students and researchers at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies as part of their coursework or research projects. The narrators come from diverse backgrounds and recount a wide range of different trajectories, allowing us to see a broader spectrum of historical experience.

There is not much documentation on the history of queer social spaces in Geneva, Switzerland. Despite same sex marriage being legalized in the country only in 2021, queer social spaces have

been around for decades and allow queer individuals a safe location to socialize regardless of surrounding political conversations. Historically, queer spaces have been dominated specifically by gay rhetoric and culture – such as the title of “gay bar” and being spaces primarily made up of men who love men. With the domination of gay-male specific rhetoric, the large remaining portion of the LGBTQIA+ community, in particular queer women and non-binary individuals, are left without a social space.

This interview aims to understand the perspective of a frequent patron of le Phare, and other queer social spaces in Geneva. It discusses what they believe makes a space queer and defines the difference between mere queer-friendly spaces versus overtly queer spaces. The interview follows the thought processes of an individual who planned dozens of queer events for groups encompassing all different queer identities. This interview investigates Geneva more broadly in what it is missing in regard to queer social spaces.

Narrator:

Juji Faure is a second-year master’s student in neuroscience at the University of Geneva. Originally from Grenoble, France, they moved to Geneva in 2020 to pursue their graduate degree. While in Geneva, Juji began a social group, Sapphics in Geneva, to bring together individuals who consider themselves to be a part of the queer sapphic community. The group, who primarily exists on WhatsApp and Instagram, has grown to over 200 individuals. They also are a former member who was heavily involved in Think Out, the University of Geneva’s queer student association.

Interviewer:

Amanda Monroe is a second-year master's student at the Geneva Graduate Institute in Development Studies. While her typical research regards the intersection of urbanization and humanitarianism, she also has a personal interest in queer histories and politics. She is an active member, and former Administrative Chair, for the Queer International Student Assembly. In general, Amanda considers herself to be active within the Genevan queer social space.

Format

1 m4a audio file: (1) December 7, 2022, 30:21

Transcript:

Initial transcription produced by Descript; edited and reviewed by Amanda Monroe. Transcript has been reviewed and approved by Juji Faure. Square brackets [] indicate insertions made by the interviewee, mostly for translation purposes.

Bibliography and Footnote Citation Forms***Audio recording***

Bibliography: Juji Faure. Interview by Amanda Monroe. Audio recording, December 7, 2022.

Graduate Institute Oral History Project, IHEID.

Footnote: Juji Faure, interview by Amanda Monroe, audio recording, December 7, 2022,

Graduate Institute Oral History Project, IHEID.

Transcript

Bibliography: Juji Faure. Interview by Amanda Monroe. Transcript, December 7, 2022.

Graduate Institute Oral History Project, IHEID.

Footnote: Juji Faure, interview by Amanda Monroe, transcript, December 7, 2022, Graduate Institute Oral History Project, IHEID.

Juji Faure Interview 1/1, December 7, 2022

Amanda Monroe

Okay, hello!

Juji Faure

Hello!

Amanda Monroe

So, I am Amanda, and I am here doing an interview with Juji in their apartment on December 7th at around 9:30 in the morning. Juji lives here in Geneva and before we begin, I just want to get your oral consent for the recording of this interview.

And like I said, after the interview, I'll be giving a release form, that you can choose to sign or not, on whether or not you wish to release this interview.

Juji Faure

Yeah, I do consent for all of this.

Amanda Monroe

Incredible. All right. Just to start off if you want to tell me a bit about yourself. Introduce yourself, what brought you here to Geneva, where you were before, things like that.

Juji Faure

So hi, I'm Juji. To make it quick, I'm French. I've lived like 15 years in France in a small town called Grenoble. I did my studies there. I did my psychology bachelor and then I wanted to do a neuroscience master. I was searching everywhere in Europe, and the one in Geneva seemed to be the best one, the most, like multidisciplinary one. So, I arrived to Geneva, really out of nowhere and not knowing anything about Geneva, but it's fine. That was in 2020. And yeah, I started a science masters, and now I'm doing my fifth semester. So, I'm nearly done.

I could go more into detail, but I don't know.

Amanda Monroe

Yeah, you're welcome to share as much or as little as you want.

Juji Faure

I'm very comfortable in Geneva because it has a very international ambiance. I lived for a long time in London and in Hong Kong too before going to France. So, I really like this international feeling, it is just very familiar to me, and I feel very, very good in Geneva. I also feel like Geneva, it's the city with the most queer life than the other cities I've been in. I mean, of course London and Hong Kong are definitely more queer, but I was five years old, so that doesn't really count. I lived in Grenoble, but it was not really, that queer friendly. I also lived in Spain in a very small town, so same. So, yeah.

Amanda Monroe

Cool. Do you maybe want to expand upon what about Geneva feels so queer friendly to you?

Juji Faure

I mean, just the fact that there are a few queer bars and cafe, just the fact that they exist. In Grenoble actually there, I mean there were, one or two mostly gay bars, and it was, yes, it was only usually cis men or like 50 plus year old women. So, I never felt really identified. And also, the only queer club was very, it was mostly heterosexual people, heterosexual couples looking for, you know - And it felt very, very, very weird. And I just, I mean nobody in the queer community would actually go out in these places in Grenoble.

Amanda Monroe

So then within Geneva, what sort of queer spaces have you gotten involved in? Like how have you really entered into that space in the city?

Juji Faure

So, I came to Geneva, and it was in the middle of the Covid crisis.

Amanda Monroe

Rough.

Juji Faure

There wasn't much. I did hear of, well, le Phare and also of like Lestime the like lesbian association. And Livresse, which I might be wrong, but I think it's a lesbian cafe. I also realized

that there were many gay men communities, like for different types of sports. If you search on Instagram, there are at least 10 different but nothing for queer women.

In February 2021, I created Sapphics in Geneva. Which is a community that for now only exists on Instagram and Facebook, but it's a community for queer women, for anyone who identifies as lesbian, bisexual, non-binary, trans, like anyone who identifies with being sapphic. And from that moment, when restrictions were a bit looser, we started organizing events and doing anything together -sports, going to clubs together, and we started going to le Phare, also Garçonnerie, which is more like a *discothèque*, but they have drag shows.

Amanda Monroe

Awesome. So, then maybe if you want to kind of go back in time, as best you can, and talk about your first experience going to le Phare? And how did you find it - was there anything or was it just kind of like a happy accident?

Juji Faure

I mostly heard of it but that was like at least eight months after arriving in Geneva. I remember searching at some point on the internet, on Instagram, like “queer places Geneva” and it was hard to find. I had to really do a lot of research, I felt like a stalker.

I don't have a very clear memory of going to le Phare for the first time honestly. I think I was not with Sapphics. I was with other friends, and they presented it as a queer friendly place. I didn't know if it was really queer, or just like friendly. I just remember that there was a very nice

atmosphere. Very chill too. It was not necessarily, it was a weekday. So, yeah. I don't know. I felt a bit home. I didn't even see so many gay flags or LGBT anything, but I, I felt, I felt home. Also, this might seem random, but on the street of le Phare, there's the rainbow colors on the streets and I feel like it's a good introduction to le Phare.

Amanda Monroe

Definitely. I feel like the outdoor space of le Phare really captures it.

Juji Faure

It's really nice.

Amanda Monroe

So then maybe if you want to expand more upon this. You didn't quite know if it was going to be queer friendly versus queer. If you want to describe what the difference is in those two things for you and how the bar does actually feel to you now.

Juji Faure

Queer friendly, a queer friendly place for me is a place that is run by people who are definitely open-minded and who know a lot about the LGBTQ+ community but they don't necessarily act upon it, or like they're not really involved in anything more. What I see in le Phare, just when you enter le Phare you can see a lot of - I don't have the English word for that, *affiche*, like just papers on the wall.

Amanda Monroe

The posters?

Juji Faure

Posters of any queer events like past or future, mostly past events. Yeah, I don't know what to say more. Like it's just everywhere in le Phare that you can see all of these. I think the bathroom is also kind of gender neutral. It's just little changes like these. And I didn't feel the presence of so many cis men looking at me or something. That's mostly what I can think of it.

Amanda Monroe

Great. And then, you mentioned how you started Sapphics in Geneva, and this has grown into quite a large group of people, which is incredible. And being, you know, a member of the group myself, there's a lot of events that are hosted at le Phare. I'm just kind of curious, when you are thinking of hosting a queer event, what is the kind of space that you're looking for? And especially in a group that encompasses so many different queer identities, why does le Phare feel like a safe space to do so?

Juji Faure

When I think of the options, I think of Nathan's bar, which is more in Eaux-Vives, I think of Livresse, and la Garçonnerie. And the thing with Nathan's is I feel like it's really not the same age group. And also again, it's a lot of gay men. I don't have anything against gay men, obviously. But, honestly, it's mostly the age and the music that doesn't really fit our generation. Then I think of Livresse, which is more like a cafe. So, it's very nice to hang out during the day,

but it's not really a place I would go out at night. La Garçonnerie, which is definitely a club, so it's not the best place to actually interact with people.

Now with Sapphics in Geneva we are a few different organizers. Some organize like sports events - they used to, they're not really involved anymore - and I organize more like the bar events. For some reason I specialize in bar events, and I just feel like le Phare is a great combination of queer friendly and not only gay friendly, and also age friendly. I mean, we can see that we have kind of the same age, the music is really on point. It's very close to the city center and also, it's kind of the only option. It's not like I have 10 different options and I chose le Phare. It's really like, it was kind of the only option that actually made sense for a bar setting. But of course, if it was for another setting, sports or just hang out during the day, I would've gone to another place. I also think of this summer, there was like a *canopée* [an outside bar/terrace]. So, that was really nice.

Yeah, mostly age, queer friendly, music and location.

Amanda Monroe

Gotcha, and so you keep kind of talking about, you know, how there's not a lot of options. I'm curious what then, your thoughts are about – do you see the possibility of creating another queer bar within Geneva? Do you think there's space for that? Do you think there's a community for that? Or do you think that part of the issue is maybe there's just like not enough?

Juji Faure

I really think there's a community for it. I mean, my source is mainly Instagram, so it might be biased. There are so many small groups, small organizations, and there's a very big queer life actually with associations like 360 in Geneva. I think there is definitely enough people.

I do understand that in Geneva, the people don't necessarily want to party. It's not their priority. They're like very much into working. It's not the same as like Berlin for example, but there definitely is enough people and people who are like motivated to. So that's not the issue, I think, about the place.

Honestly, I don't know enough how it works in Geneva, in Switzerland. I guess it can be like very expensive and you might be a bit scared of not actually having enough people showing up. Right now, when I think of it, there's also le Déclit. I completely forgot of it, but it's a queer, gay place in the very center of Geneva, in Plainpalais, and they mostly do like karaoke but it's just a bar. And when I go there, I'm actually kind of shocked to see that it's in the center, it's the easiest place to go, and there's sometimes nobody – even Fridays and Saturdays.

I know that there's this big community, but I don't know where they are - except on social media. So, that's a bit frustrating. But there definitely, there could be a very, very nice option to create. I'm sure it would be possible.

Amanda Monroe

Fair enough. So then kind of going back, in any sort of maybe vacation you've had, or I know you mentioned there were not a lot of queer bars in the places you've lived in the past, but do you

have any experience that sticks out in your head of when you were in that space and in particular a social space, a bar type place, where you were like “this, this feels like peak, just queer friendly vibes” or not even queer friendly as you were saying, but proper queer vibes?

Juji Faure

Yes, absolutely. I was in Madrid. I mean, Spain is a very particular country because you have a lot of religious people who are very, very traditional but it's also one of the first countries to allow gay marriage. They're very, like half of the population is extremely, extremely open on any LGBTQ question. And Madrid is like just a peak of Spain. You have *quartiers* - how do I say that in English?

Amanda Monroe

Um, like neighborhoods?

Juji Faure

Neighborhoods, yeah. Which is only for like queer, gay bars, cafes, libraries, whatever. You feel really at home. You have rainbow flags everywhere. In some ways I can sense that people are queer. It's a bit hard to explain, but just the way they express themselves. They're very more, I mean they're very more expressive. Like not just verbally, but also physically. They have a lot of piercings, they're very like extravagant. Also, New York. I've been there once and obviously I've had that too, but it's a bit too far in my memories. Madrid I definitely felt like home.

Amanda Monroe

And so, for you, what is the importance personally of having these spaces where you can go and you can socialize – where you know that there's going to be other queer individuals there, you know that it is okay to overtly show queerness if you want to? And what is that feeling like for you?

Juji Faure

It's a feeling of just being able to be myself with no restriction, not having to think of what I'm saying or my attitude - like, “Am I acting too masculine?” “Did I dress too masculine?” or “Am I not smiling enough at this guy?” - All these questions that come up, usually in other settings they don't come up here. And that feels very liberating.

It's also surprising because I have a lot of, I mean, I have a few, queer friends that don't feel that need at all. I mean, they don't necessarily even go out a lot in general, and they don't feel the need to be part of a queer community and that's really hard to imagine for me. So, I don't think it's the case for anybody, but if you're quite sensitive - I mean, for me, queerness is like a big part of my identity. It's not just a detail because I'm queer with my sexual orientation, but also with my gender identity so like, it covers a lot of my identity. Just seeing people who are kind of similar to me, it just makes me remember that I'm not so weird or so different. I'm actually like a lot of people. And they're also lost sometimes in their identities, and if we're all lost together, then we just find ourselves. That was very poetic.

Amanda Monroe

No, I get that. And the importance of having this community that you can lean on and go to - that like anything you're saying isn't going to be seen odd or as “why are you thinking that or feeling that way?”

Juji Faure

Yeah, yeah.

Amanda Monroe

So earlier you had mentioned how Geneva feels like a very – that there was a large queer presence, or at least in your experience in other cities especially where you've lived. I'm curious what you think with the fact that gay marriage was just legalized, right? Do you think that at all impacted the way that you saw queer spaces before versus after? Or do you think that it was just a formality that like everyone knew was coming?

Juji Faure

I arrived in Switzerland in 2020 and I honestly didn't know much about Switzerland. Like unfortunately a lot of people. I arrived in Geneva, and I felt like although there weren't so many queer places, the city was very, very open-minded in any sort of questions especially on the LGBTQ+ question. So, I was like, “wow, this is actually a very open-minded country.” But I had a conversation with a few Swiss friends who told me it's really not the case in other places. Especially more in the mountain areas of Switzerland and that they're actually very traditional and they are always like 10-20 years late on other countries of Europe. I had no idea that gay marriage wasn't legalized, and I was really shocked. I was really shocked. And yeah, it did

change a bit my perception. I went back to reality – “okay, this is a very, very queer friendly city, but the rest of the country isn't, not necessarily.” So, I feel like in Switzerland it's the same feeling as in France in 2012 before the gay marriage was legalized. I still feel like queer and gay places are a bit underground. You go there, but you don't necessarily talk super openly about it. It still feels a bit like - not illegal, of course - but like you're really a different part of society. That you're a bit excluded, you know? So yeah.

Amanda Monroe

Yeah. Do you think maybe that kind of what you're saying with this, it felt kind of underground and stuff, had to do with when you were searching and like googling places to go, why it was so difficult?

Juji Faure

Yeah, yeah. Absolutely. It's so hard to find sometimes. It's just like you have to hear someone who tells you about that place. Especially, like Nathan's Cafe. You had to do research. And also, for some reason, Switzerland is also late on Instagram. So many things happen on other social media like Facebook that I don't really go on anymore. Even like websites! It was like what I said, it feels like France or any country of West Europe like 20 years ago when it was hard to find information because you didn't have internet. But it feels kind of the same. And it's really surprising because Geneva - before moving to Geneva - I just had this image of a very modern and open city. It's a bit surprising.

Amanda Monroe

Do you think part of that is maybe what keeps these queer spaces so queer? In that you have to know someone to find them and figure it out, as opposed to them being so accessible and then maybe being a bit diluted by different people coming and not realizing that it's meant to be a safe space for queer people.

Juji Faure

Yeah, no, it's true. I hadn't thought of it this way. It feels like you have to be a bit special to know that place. Like you have to be queer, but you also have to be involved in some sort of queer community beforehand. Which is tricky because not everyone has social media or Instagram. So, you have to know the right person. It's really tricky. It definitely helps for the places to keep being only queer and not mix with straight people, but I still think it's sad.

Amanda Monroe

Then going back then to your experiences at le Phare and how you feel when you go and all of these things. I'm wondering if you maybe wanted to talk a little bit more about when you go to the bar and you're there and you're there with your friends - what about it keeps you coming back? Is it just because it's one of the only queer bars or are there other aspects that you look for within a social place that le Phare has?

Juji Faure

Yes, like the first reason is because I don't have a lot of choice. Second reason is it's still a very cozy place. It's a bar where you can still actually talk and hear people, kind of. It's just very - I mean - it's in the city center, it's a perfect location and I know a bit the people who work there. I

mean, I've been there, and I've never actually talked to the people who work there except for just like ordering a drink, but I bumped into them a few times in the city center, and they recognized me, and I recognized them, and it really felt nice because we never actually talk but I see that they pay attention to who's coming. And that really feels nice. It feels like more personal than just a random bar where people come and go.

But I'm not going to say that I'm super, super attached. Like I'm not. I still feel a bit frustrated by le Phare sometimes because of the fact that it's a bit too cozy, or I'm kind of looking for a place that's like in between a bar and *discothèque*, like a bar that you actually can dance in. I know we've hosted events in another place that's not queer, but like we were just queer people, and we could dance, and it really felt like the best option ever. So yeah, for le Phare, I still feel some frustrations.

It's nice to be there because I see a lot of queer people that I haven't seen before. And I felt like I had seen all the queer people in Geneva because I felt like at the beginning there were not that much. And when I arrived, when I go to le Phare, I realized there were much more than what I expected. I realized there were small groups of people meeting, and queer people meeting. They all seemed to be super attached to that place. So yeah, I don't feel that attachment so strong, but I still have a very nice feeling when I go there. I feel like if I stay a bit more in Geneva for a few years, then I would probably get more attached to that place. Right now, it's a bit hard to say that. I absolutely love it.

Amanda Monroe

It's been like two years, so totally fair. Just maybe to end on - if you had any final thoughts about queer bars, and about going out in queer social spaces that you've experienced before, that you would like to see within Geneva at all?

Juji Faure

Well, yeah when I think of it. So, I went to Vienna in Austria and, of course it's a capital, it's much bigger, but there was a queer café bar. I don't know how to say that. It was a very good mix between like a bar, and there was a bar place, with a lot of tables and music, then a kind of separated space for poetry reading. I feel like it was amazing because when I think of it, like the most developed places that are queer, are bars. It would be nice to have a bit more diversity. Not just bars because not everyone wants to party. And even if I actually like, I love, partying and going to bars, it's nice to do something different. Something like a sort of activity actually. Because when you go to a bar it's very nice, you drink, you talk about stuff, but you're not really doing something like an activity. Sometimes activities are actually easier to make people bond easier.

This place, it was poetry reading in every kind of language you wanted. So, I got involved with it and I read like French poetry. Obviously, nobody understood what I was talking about, and there were so many other languages, and we didn't understand at all what the other people were saying, but we felt so close to them. It was people that I didn't know at all, but I felt like they were my siblings. You know what I mean? So, this is the kind of things that I want to see developed. I don't know if I - I really forgot the question.

Amanda Monroe

No, that's great!

Juji Faure

Yeah, something that's a bit different from just a bar or a party.

Amanda Monroe

Awesome, well if you have any other thoughts that you wanted to get out and mention or -

Juji Faure

Let me think - no, I don't think so.

Amanda Monroe

Awesome. Well then, I will stop our recording here.